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ABSTRACT

In the past, almost all student follow-up studies have been cross institutional or very broad in nature. The target has consisted of populations of graduates, dropouts, or longitudinal entering classes. The output measures have centered around continued education of the population, job situation, mobility, reason for leaving, or a general evaluation of the educational experience. While these broad institutional student outcome studies impress groups external to the institution, they are of little value to the internal educational manager who must make decisions about curriculum, program size, and recruitment for major fields, since this type of decision is usually at the department or divisional level. The internal educational manager needs information about a very specific population of former students and very specific output and evaluation data. This presentation explains why two types of student outcome research are needed at an institution: one to satisfy external demand, and another to provide managerial information needed for internal decision-making. Examples of each type of research are given, along with descriptions of recommended methodologies to be used in each case. (Author/NHM)

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CONFLICT IN STUDENT OUTPUT STUDIES

NATIONAL AND STATE NEEDS VS. LOCAL MANAGEMENT NEEDS

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for Institutional Research Forum
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In the past almost all student follow-up studies designed to measure output have been organized along similar lines. First, the target has consisted of populations or samples of (a) graduates of an institution, (b) dropouts from an institution or (c) longitudinal entering classes. These groups are almost always cross institutional or very broad in nature.

The output measures have centered around continued education, job situation, mobility, reason for leaving, general evaluation and sometimes measures in change of attitude or perception. Continued education measures center around the new instituion, grade point performance, new degrees pursued or relatedness of field at new institution to field at target institution. Job information might include salary, skill level and relatedness to major at target college. General evaluation would center around general ratings or services received or groups of courses taken. There are a number of measures on the market which measure attitude and perception change.

These kinds of studies impress and are encouraged by National Educational Organizations, National Educational Professional Groups, Accrediting Agencies, and State Governing Agenices. Many journal articles are written which analyze such data and compare data across institutions. However, at the institutional level such studies are of little value except to impress the external community.

Needs of the Local Institution

Consider how a local manager could make any decisions on such findings as an increase in dropout rates, students performing poorer or better in their continued education than students at comparison colleges, an increase in students leaving their major field, an increase in the mobility, a change in the reasons

for leaving or less attitude change among students than at comparison institutions. Even if such findings were verified and were mutually agreed upon as serious problems, there would be little an institutional officer could do. Such possible courses of action as changes in admission standards, changes in grading standards, changes in teaching methods, changes in curriculum or expansion or reduction of programs would have to be carried out at the department, division or the major area level.

Such managers at the departmental level could not make these decisions on the basis of broad general institutional data. They demand specific data about "their" students. Therefore, the conflict. The institutional follow-up studies, which were so impressive to the external agencies and the journal audiences, are of little value to the mangers who must make decisions on the basis of the implications of follow-up studies.

This author has carried out a number of broad institutional follow-up studies which include short and long term follow-up of graduates, follow-up of dropouts and longitudinal studies. However, in response to the decision making manager, this author has now designed a number of specific surveys for major areas of study. These specific surveys differ in two major ways from the broad institutional follow-ups.

How Specific Surveys Differ From Traditional Institution Wide Outcome Studies

First, the target population is different. The institutional studies sample all the graduates, all the dropouts or entering classes. The specific major area of study surveys, however, are only interested in students graduating from one program, students generating so many hours in one program or students taking certain courses. Each manager will define the target population differently. Second, the output data will be different and much more specific. Job information

can be obtained which will pinpoint a detailed job description which relates to the major field. Specific evaluations can be made about individual courses and services offered by the target program. In some cases attitude change measures can be obtained when they are related to program objectives. In addition, future education plans, mobility and other general status data can be gathered.

Examples Which Aid the Internal Decision Making Process

There are a number of specific follow-up studies which have been conducted at Harper College which can be cited as examples of how management used follow-up studies to make academic decisions. From these examples it will be seen why these specific follow-up studies were needed for decision making and why the broad institutional type of follow-up studies would not have sufficied.

Business Fields

All previous students who had graduated with an associate degree in Secretarial Science were followed for a year after leaving. Results of the survey showed over 75 percent of these former students were working as secretaries. In evaluating Harper's education, many courses were rated as very beneficial while some electives were rated as marginal. This helped in the academic advising process as to which electives would be recommended for new students and which would be of most benefit to them later on. The results also indicated a very high percent of the graduates were required to do statistical typing which helped determine future emphasis in future courses.

In another follow-up study, students who had declared themselves a major in Supervisory and Administrative Management were followed-up one year later. Results of the survey indicated over 80 percent remained in the field which indicated the coordinators could safely expand the program without risking

overflooding the job market. Many former students indicated they wish they had developed more oral and written skills for use in business. This led to the development of English courses designed specifically for business majors.

The Marketing Mid-Management coordinator selected students who had accumulated 48 or more hours and who had taken three or more core courses as the target population for a follow-up study. This study found three-fourths remained in the field after leaving Harper and that they earned on the average a higher salary than the graduates of any other career program at Harper. Moreover, over 90 percent had no difficulty in finding a job. Again this indicated this program should be expanded and it was. The survey also indicated these students used counseling to a much greater extent than other career students and thus it was known that this expansion would lead to a greater impact on the counseling services. In addition, the survey indicated additional courses in Human Relations and Marketing Research would be helpful. Both of these findings had been incorporated into the curriculum modification.

In still another follow-up survey, any student who had taken one or more core courses in Data Processing over a five year period was followed. The study demonstrated that the program was serving as either support for people in other fields or in upgrading skills of people already on the job. Few students were being prepared to enter the field for the first time. A number of course areas were identified as being useful as non-credit continuing educational offerings which could supplement the present program.

Service Fields

Students, who at one time during a three year period had declared themselves as an Interior Design major, were targeted and sent a follow-up questionnaire. Results of the survey produced a profile of those former students who were working.

Over three-fourths of those working were on jobs related to Interior Design and these jobs were divided into 23 different classifications. This allowed the coordinator to determine how related the curriculum was to the actual job content of former students.

In another study, students who had majored in Criminal Justice were followed. It was noted that a number of graduates with an associate degree in Criminal Justice with no experience were having difficulty finding positions in the field. This finding prompted an effort to increase the academic advising services for these students. In the future student who have no experience in the Criminal Justice field will be advised to either continue their education to the bachelor's degree or prepare for a very specialized technical area.

All students who had taken the final Child Care seminar course were surveyed a year after leaving Harper. This study indicated few could find full-time jobs in the field and those who could were working at very low salaries. As a result of this finding, the growth of the program was curtailed, the leadership of the program was changed and graduates of the program were advised to utilize some of their skills in a wider range of jobs only somewhat related to Child Care.

Students who had indicated their major field was Legal Technology were surveyed one year after leaving Harper. This study indicated these former students felt they were not working up to their potential. Over half indicated they performed some typing. Also, it was difficult to find enough positions in attorney's offices. As a result in-service continuing education programs were designed to demonstrate the proper use of Legal Technicians for attorneys. In addition, new positions were found for Legal Technicians in a variety of agencies where they could work up to their potential.

Health Fields

Dental Hygiene graduates, over a three year period, were followed and this survey found 99 percent of these graduates were working in their field. The favorable job situation meant the program could expand. However, the survey also indicated the graduates felt they were capable of performing many more expanded duties than they were now permitted. Thus, even though these graduates were satisfied with their positions now, this situation could lead to dissatisfaction in the future with so many highly qualified persons.

Follow-up studies have also been conducted among graduates of the Nursing Program. These surveys indicate to what extent nurses are required to perform in 36 different skill areas thus allowing a detailed relevancy comparison between the curriculum and the job requirements. In addition, a number of working relationship are identified as well as measures of effectiveness of preparation in each of these areas. These nursing follow-up studies uncovered that Harper graduates felt well prepared in all areas except in the area of leadership. This seemed important as over 80 percent of these graduates were required to exhibit supervisory or leadership skills. As a result, a continuing education program was designed to provide leadership and supervisory training for persons in the health fields.

Technical Field

In the Architectural Technology program, all former students, who had taken three or more core courses, were followed. This study revealed about 64 percent were working in the field. Their work was broken out in 28 different classifications which provided a very descriptive work profile of the former students. In addition, salary and geographic location information was obtained on these Harper alumni.

This study was used as a recruiting device to attract new students to the program. Students, after reading this report, would discover what they realistically could expect to earn and what type of work they would most likely be doing. Thus students who did enroll in the program would most likely have realistic expectations of the program.

Non-Credit Field

In a study which is now underway, former participants in the Women's program are being followed one year later. The purpose of this study will be to determine the extent to which these participants have gained in self-confidence and have widened their horizons. The outcome of this study will determine whether this program should be expanded, leveled-off or curtailed.

Conclusion

These specific studies, which have been described, have provided very unique information such as a detailed job analysis profile and very specific evaluation data. Moreover, this data has been collected from a very specific target population of former students. These two factors have allowed managers to make informed decisions concerning curriculum revision and development, expansion, academic advising services, job placement services and recruitment. The traditional institution wide follow-up studies would have provided little benefit to the managers in making such decisions.

It is not the purpose of this paper to assert that the traditional institution wide follow-up studies are worthless and should be discontinued. Institutions still must justify their existence to the local community, to the state and to the Federal Government. Moreover, professionals still must seek visibility among their professional associations. For these purposes the traditional institution wide approach is the only follow-up study which is appropriate.

This paper is saying that an institution must engage in two types of student outcome or follow-up study. One type will satisfy external pressures while the other will be an extremely valuable aid in the internal decision making processes. This paper has shown that these two types of studies cannot be mixed in one outcome effort. Rather, the institution must commit itself to the conduct of two different types of outcome studies for two widely different purposes.

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